



Patients say medical marijuana has given them back their lives; they seek reliable, legal sources

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By **Jim Harger | The Grand Rapids Press**



Jim Harger | The Grand Rapids Press Face of relief: Hepatitis patient

Richard Julien, top, shows his marijuana-patient registration card. SIDNEY — Richard Julien says medical marijuana gave him his life back. Now he wants to be legal.

Julien, 41, of Rockford, who said he has hepatitis C and other illnesses, said smoking marijuana daily has allowed him to give up four high-powered prescription painkillers.

"When I'm medicated (with marijuana), I feel good. When I'm not, I'm nauseated and I can't sleep," said Julien, one of 50 persons attending a meeting of the Mid Michigan Compassion Club on Thursday.

Since he began smoking marijuana in 2004, Julien said it has helped him cope with the side effects of the interferon he takes. It has also helped him control his temper and lose about 100 pounds.

Since the **state rules for medical marijuana** were released last spring, Julien said he has been ripped off by two persons who signed up to become his legal caregiver.

As the father of two children with a third on the way, Julien said he is hoping to find a reliable source who can legally supply his need for 28 grams every 10 days. Otherwise, he will grow it at home, he said.

Abraham Scharaswak said he also hopes to find a legal supply to ease his chronic pain and muscle spasms.

In 2003, the 27-year-old Stanton resident said, he broke his neck in four places when he was thrown out of a minivan that rolled over. He is partially paralyzed and uses a motorized wheelchair. [View a photo gallery](#)

Marijuana has allowed him to go from 14 prescriptions to five or six, said Schwaraswak, who said he smokes from a pipe four or five times a day.

"I feel great. I'm not drugged down," the father of two said. "I'm living a life and that's something I wasn't able to do for five years."

Toney Smith, of Six Lakes, said marijuana has allowed him to reduce his intake of Vicodin and Neurontin for pain brought on by arthritis and three "blown" discs in his back.

Smith, who said he smokes two joints every evening, recently obtained his medical marijuana registration card.

While he may grow his own supply one day, Smith said he currently is supplied "through people I know."

Smith, who is employed as a maintenance man at a Remus manufacturing company, said his employer is aware of his alternative treatment. He does not smoke before work or during the work day.

"I want to do everything legal," he said. "That's the whole purpose."

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